



It's Friday October 1, 2021. In today's issue: Pop Up Archives event; Indigenous People's Day; New to the National Register of Historic Places; Who killed South Omaha's mayor?; Nebraska archeology stories; How an abolitionist priest helped segregate Nebraska City schools; October events.

Pop Up Archives event October 7



Come to the Nebraska History Museum on October 7 to meet our curators and archivists and learn about interesting and unusual items in our collections. It's also a good opportunity to ask questions and learn more about preserving your family's precious objects.

Pre-registration is required and spots are limited – [learn more here](#).

Indigenous People's Day event to honor Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte



Nebraska will celebrate its first Indigenous People's Day on October 11. Among the events planned for the day is the dedication of a statue of Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte, the first Native woman in the US to become a physician. The statue will stand near the south end of Centennial Mall in Lincoln, a block-and-a-half north of the State Capitol. Read more about Dr. Picotte's life [here](#) and [here](#).

The [Lincoln Journal Star has more news](#) about Indigenous People's Day events in the capital city.

Nebraska properties added to the National Register of Historic Places



Located on the west end of **Hyannis**, the Abbott Ranch Headquarters is home to a sprawling complex of buildings that the Abbott family used for ranching from 1896 until about 1954.

The Morgan-Fricke Residence, a Colonial Revival style house in **Plattsmouth**, was built in 1901 and serves as an upscale set of apartments.

The buildings of Dana College in **Blair** date mostly from the mid-twentieth century. Although the college closed in 2010, the property has been acquired by Angels Share, an Omaha non-profit working to end homelessness. [Keep reading.](#)



More than 10,000 books are stored in the McGogon Library Rare Books Room at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. And those nice cabinets? Turns out they won't keep out drywall dust. Recent renovations to the building coated the rare books with a layer of dust that could damage them if not removed carefully.

Fortunately, staff at History Nebraska's Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center knew what to do. [Keep reading.](#)

Who killed South Omaha's mayor? Anti-Catholicism in Omaha in October 1892



South Omaha Mayor Charles P. Miller was found unconscious and mortally wounded by a bullet. He died the next day.

Though it looked like a suicide, an organization called the American Protective Association was convinced that Miller had been murdered by Catholics as part of a sinister plot. The APA's weekly Omaha newspaper, *The American*, spread unfounded rumors and tried to discredit local "Romanist" officials. The clipping above is the headline from October 14, 1892.

Anti-Catholicism has a long history in the United States. It spiked during periods of economic turmoil and rising immigration by Catholic ethnic groups. The 1890s was such a time.

The American's editor claimed that the group wasn't prejudiced against individual Catholics. But the newspaper consistently portrayed Catholic immigrants as lawless, corrupt, and loyal to the Pope in a way that made them disloyal to the United States.

The APA claimed vindication when two Catholic men were arrested for the murder of the Protestant mayor. What was the result of the sensational trial? [Keep reading.](#)

Nebraska Archeology Stories

September was Nebraska Archeology Month, and the Nebraska State Archeology Office wrote several new posts about their work at state historical parks.

Ash Hollow



This state park is best known as a stopping point along the Oregon and Mormon trails, but its history of human occupation goes back ten thousand years. The archeological record helps interpret human adaptation to this rugged yet visually stunning landscape. [Keep reading.](#)

Rock Creek Station



Rock Creek Station is the name for two stations or road ranches on either side of a ford of Rock Creek. The ranches served many roles—Pony Express station, stage station, general store, blacksmith shop, and likely a post office—but is best known for a shooting by James Butler “Wild Bill” Hickok. [Keep reading.](#)

Bugles at Fort Robinson



If you're an army bugler, is it better to have lots and lots of mouthpieces you don't need rather than need one and not have it.

Is there a better explanation for all these bugle mouthpieces discovered at the site? [Keep reading.](#)

Fort Atkinson Council House



Fort Atkinson was the army's westernmost outpost in the 1820s, built to be self-sufficient and composed of 30 to 40 buildings at its height. [Keep reading.](#)

Two bits



Making change at Fort Atkinson, Nebraska was a lot harder in the 1820s than it is today. Common practice at the time was to cut dollar coins into eight "bits," two bits being the equivalent of a quarter. [Keep reading.](#)

And read about archeological work at [Fort Hartsuff State Park](#) and [Chadron State Park](#).

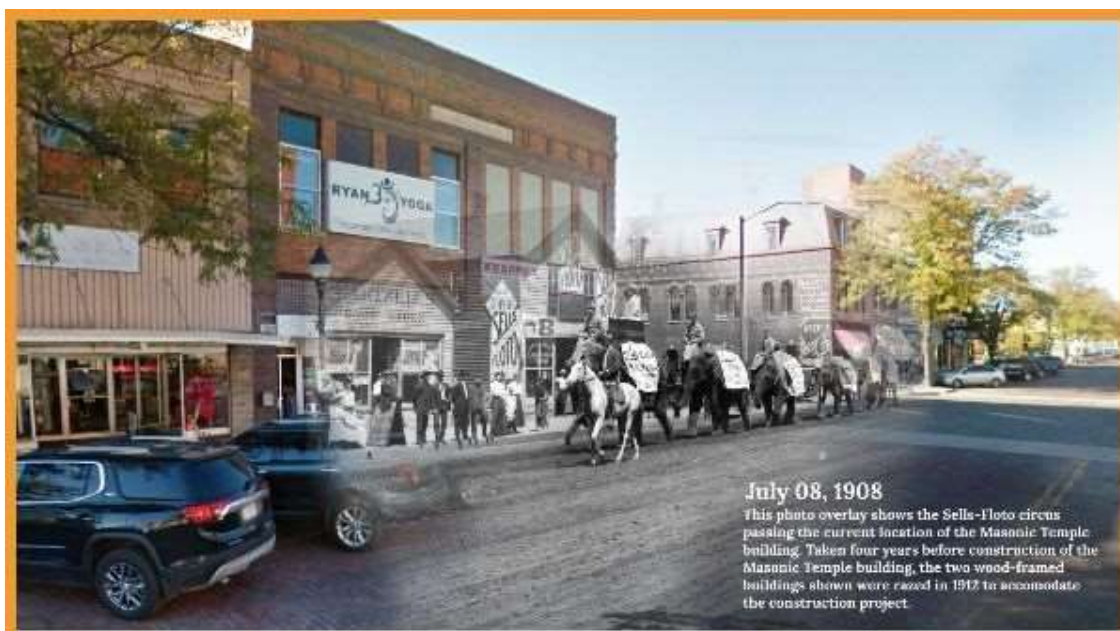
How an abolitionist priest helped segregate Nebraska City schools



Rev. Robert W. Oliver had been a radical abolitionist before the Civil War. While living in Pennsylvania he was part of the Underground Railroad, assisting Black people fleeing enslavement. Later, in Nebraska City, the Episcopalian priest worked with a Black minister to found a church and school to serve local Black residents.

History is full of ironies. Oliver believed he was protecting Black children when he insisted that Nebraska City's public schools should be segregated by race. Jo Wetherilt Behrens tells the story of the "colored school" in the Summer 2021 issue of *Nebraska History Magazine*. [Keep reading.](#)

October Events



On October 7, tour and experience the newly rehabilitated Hibberd Block and in-progress rehabilitation project at Lowe & Fair Building in downtown Kearney. Join us for the 2021 History Nebraska Annual Meeting in Omaha on October 14, and come to the Nebraska History Museum for An Evening with Artist Lori Thomas on October 21. [Keep reading.](#)



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Complete articles:

Pop Up Archives

When:

Thursday, October 7, 2021 - 3:00pm to 6:00pm

Where:

Nebraska History Museum, 131 Centennial Mall North, Lincoln, NE

Meet History Nebraska Curators and Archivists and read pop-up factoids about interesting and unusual items from the archives.

Get answers to questions like: What's in History Nebraska's Archives? How do I access these amazing resources? How do I preserve my family photos?

See Highlights from the Audiovisual, Manuscript, Digital and Library Collections.

Pop Up Archives will be held at the Nebraska History Museum. Attendees are asked to adhere to any Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department's DHMs in effect on the day of the event; masks may be required. Please register for one of three 1-hour time slots; number of attendees for each time slot is limited.

Register [HERE](#).

Abbott Ranch, Dana College, and Morgan Fricke House Added to National Register of Historic Places

The National Register of Historic Places is the nation's inventory of properties deemed worthy of preservation. It is part of a national program to coordinate and support local and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect the nation's historic and archeological resources. The National Register was developed to recognize historic places and their role in contributing to our

country's heritage. Properties listed in the National Register either individually or as contributing to a historic district are eligible for State and Federal tax incentives.

For more information on the National Register program in Nebraska, contact the Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office of History Nebraska at 402-613-1591 or visit history.nebraska.gov/historic-preservation.

The Abbott Ranch Headquarters

History Nebraska is pleased to announce the Abbott Ranch Headquarters in Hyannis has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Located on the west end of Hyannis, the site is home to a sprawling complex of buildings that the Abbott family used for ranching from 1896 until about 1954. The Abbotts built their headquarters in 1896, making it the central location from which the Abbott enterprise grew. Having acquired the land from three different federal laws, the Preemption Act, the Homestead Act, and the Timber Act, the Abbott family operated a highly successful ranching operation from the area. Their successful empire grew rapidly, and the Abbotts became prominent members of Grant County society.

The Abbotts soon became one of the premier ranching groups on the Great Plains. As premiere representation of the ranching lifestyle, the Abbotts are recognized in this nomination for their significance at a local, state, and national level as Hyannis became known as the "mecca of the Sandhills."

Their homes are some of the best existing examples of that elitism. The Chris Abbott house is a two-story Italian Renaissance Revival home with a low-pitch hipped roof covered in terra cotta clay tiles designed by famous Nebraska architect George Berlinghof. Likewise, the A.J. Abbot house is a vernacular interpretation of the Queen Anne style with a brick foundation and a pyramidal-hipped roof.



A.J. Abbott House



Chris Abbott House

Dana College

History Nebraska is pleased to announce Dana College as one of the newest locations listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Many immigrant groups from Eastern and Northern Europe have made Nebraska their new home throughout our state's history. These groups developed communities and the necessary amenities needed for long-term growth. Dana College in Blair is one such example. Representing a significant part of immigrant and Danish history in Nebraska, the college contains historical resources like Pioneer Memorial, the Charles A. Dana-LIFE Library, and Blair Hall.

Dana College grew out of the Trinity Seminary, which was a seminary founded by Danish Lutheran pioneers in Blair. In 1899, a merger between Trinity Seminary and Elk Horn Højskole, a Danish college in Elk Horn, Iowa, formed Dana College. Dana College would be visited by Danish royalty three separate times throughout its history- in 1939, 1976, and 2009. These connections highlight that Dana College had become a stronghold of Danish activity in Nebraska.

Dana College also pioneered unique academic programs. In 1956-1957, the school developed the Liberal Arts Reading Program, which encouraged student and community engagement through academics. Additionally, the college created the LARP program, designed to expose students to popular literature throughout history.

While Dana College shut its doors in 2010, the site still has a future. Angels Share, an Omaha non-profit working to end homelessness, plans to turn the old college into a campus where "those less fortunate receive the effective, compassionate care they need to be healthy in body, mind, and spirit." They plan to do this by offering a place for people aged out of the foster care system, at-risk youth, and low-to-moderate income seniors. This redevelopment highlights how historic preservation can play a role in the betterment of society.



Image 1, Pioneer Memorial, View from Southwest

Dana College

Plattsmouth's Morgan-Fricke House

Visitors to Plattsmouth turning down N. 6th Street from Avenue E or F will come across a house that appears straight out of the 18th century. The Morgan-Fricke Residence, a Colonial Revival style house, was built in 1901 and serves as an upscale set of apartments. History Nebraska is pleased to announce the house is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The house was built for Frank J. Morgan, a well-known resident of Plattsmouth. Morgan himself owned a clothing store, became the Mayor of Plattsmouth from 1902 to 1904. Morgan would go on to receive praise from the Plattsmouth Journal for always “devoting his time and energy to the advancement of every project that would be of benefit to Plattsmouth and her citizens”.

Morgan passed away in 1904, just three years after the residence was completed. In 1916, his wife, Gertrude, sold the house to Frederick G. Fricke, a German immigrant who operated a drug store until his death in 1937.

The house today is an excellent example of a Colonial Revival “Classic Box” style home, meaning it has a hipped roof and a full-width porch. The house was listed in the national register primarily for its architecture, but remains notable for its architecture and for its connections to important people in Plattsmouth’s history.



Plattsmouth's Morgan-Fricke House

Dust in the Wind



Every book on the shelves had to be removed, individually vacuumed, and returned to the shelf in order.

Ten thousand books. Three-hundred-and-twenty hours. Four vacuum cleaners. One suitcase full of bricks. That is what it took to clean up after a construction project at the University of Nebraska Medical Center.



Rows of shelves in the Rare Book Room waiting to be vacuumed.

Renovations in the building that houses the McGogon Library Rare Books Rooms sent fine particulate matter in the form of drywall dust all over the rare book collection. The rooms were not undergoing any construction, and thus were closed off to safeguard the collection. However, the fine drywall dust was pushed into the rooms through the HVAC ventilation system. It was not known to Library staff at the time, but the book storage cabinets are not sealed, which allowed for drywall dust to settle on collections materials housed within.



Even the drawers couldn't protect the books from the fine dust particles.

During renovations, the room was also used as a temporary storage space for various artifacts. These include paintings, metal medical instruments, architectural fragments, and additional flat and bound paper artifacts. These items were not covered with protective sheeting or other material.

The two Rare Books Rooms function primarily as a storage space, and one is used occasionally to host small library events. There is a total of 10,500 books stored in both rooms: 4,200 of these books are considered rare and the oldest date to the 1300s.



Half of the dust on this book has been removed to show the amount of dust that accumulated on the collection.

Drywall dust components can include gypsum, silica dust, paper, clay, resins, and mica. The fine, coarse dust is gritty to the touch, which can cause abrasions and surface damages to book cases. Particulate matter and dust is also hygroscopic in nature, which means it attracts moisture. Moisture attracts mold and pests that eat organic materials, like paper, leather, and the adhesives used to bind books. Beyond damage to the books, breathing in silica and mica particulate matter is dangerous for the lungs.



UNMC Staff helped the Ford Center Staff each day. Bricks wrapped in bookcloth (seen in red) were used to support the books when they were moved off the shelf for cleaning.

Each of the books needed to be removed in order, one shelf at a time, and cleaned. Cleaning was done with Nilfisk HEPA-Filtration vacuums and small brush attachments, which trap particulate matter rather than recycling it back into the air. Books were individually vacuumed on areas that were exposed to the drywall dust; this includes the cases (covers and spine) and head and fore edge (top and side). All the shelving and doors were vacuumed as well and wiped down with a microfiber cloth.



Left: Hilary LeFevere, Paper Conservator, cleans out one of the drawers after the books have been removed. Right: Vonnda Shaw, Conservation Technician, vacuums the spines of a shelf worth of books.

The project was divided into two stages. The first room took four people a five days to vacuum and the second room took eight days. With audio books, podcasts, and lattes from the new Dunkin Donuts downstairs in the building, the staff maintained their sanity and all the books were safely returned to their newly cleaned shelves.



Hilary LeFevere, Vonnda Shaw, Megan Griffiths (Conservation Technician), and UNMC Rare Book Librarian Erin Torell, mark the end of three weeks worth of work!

Who killed South Omaha's mayor? Anti-Catholicism in Omaha in 1892



By David L. Bristow, Editor

South Omaha Mayor Charles P. Miller was found unconscious and mortally wounded by a bullet. He died the next day.

Though it looked like a suicide, an organization called the American Protective Association was convinced that Miller had been murdered by Catholics as part of a sinister plot. The APA's weekly Omaha newspaper, *The American*, spread unfounded rumors and tried to discredit local "Romanist" officials. The clipping above is the headline from October 14, 1892.

Anti-Catholicism has a long history in the United States. The first big American anti-Catholic movement emerged in the 1830s. Others followed in the 1850s, 1890s, and 1920s, usually tied to economic turmoil and rising immigration by Catholic ethnic groups.

After an 1889 visit, British writer Rudyard Kipling remarked that Omaha “seemed to be populated entirely by Germans, Poles, Slavs, Hungarians, Croats, Magyars, and the all the scum of the Eastern European States....”

Many Nebraskans felt similar disdain. Even so, *The American* claimed to have no ethnic prejudices. The APA’s motto was “America for Americans—We hold that all men are Americans who swear allegiance to the United States without a mental reservation in favor of the Pope.” They believed that Protestants held religious beliefs that reinforced American values, while Catholics were essentially a mindless peasant mob loyal to a foreign hierarchy.

Creating distrust was a big part of APA strategy. You can see it in the sub-headline: “The Community Believes Mayor Miller, of South Omaha, Was Murdered, and the Verdict of the Coroner’s Jury Will Not Alter the Case in the Least.” In other words, it didn’t matter what the law enforcement system concluded because the APA already knew the truth.

Though the case was initially considered a suicide, *The American* claimed vindication when two Catholic men were suddenly arrested for the murder of the Protestant mayor.

During the trial, the prosecution’s case relied on the testimony of a single witness, but a parade of defense witnesses soon discredited her testimony, established an alibi for the defendants, and provided eyewitness and medical evidence that Miller’s death was probably a suicide. Douglas County Attorney T. J. Mahoney asked Judge Louis Berka to dismiss the charges—and then filed perjury charges against the lone prosecution witness.

Reading the Irish name “Mahoney,” you can probably guess how the APA reacted. In its December 9 edition, *The American* labeled the county attorney a “Romanist” and implied that he was therefore biased and unfit for office. “In short the defendants were aided in every possible way while at the same time the interests of the state were, apparently, neglected.”

The APA had insisted from the beginning that Miller’s death was a “Romanist” plot. It was prepared to celebrate a guilty verdict as proof of its claim—but exoneration worked just as well, as it demonstrated the Romanist corruption of the legal system. Within its closed loop of reasoning, the APA couldn’t lose.

The American ceased publication in 1899 and the APA faded from memory. By the 1920s the largest anti-Catholic organization in Nebraska (and in the US) was the second [Ku Klux Klan](#).

(Posted 3/17/2021; updated 9/30/2021)

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Categories:

[crime](#), [nativism](#), [Omaha](#), [Catholicism](#), [immigration](#)

Archeology in the Ash Hollow Locality

By Rob Bozell, Nebraska State Archeologist

Ash Hollow State Historical Park is not only one of the most picturesque of Nebraska’s public parks but it and surrounding areas are home to a diverse and important set of archeological resources spanning at least ten thousand years. The Ash Hollow ‘locality’ contains the full spectrum of examples of the North Platte valley’s exciting and important archeological record that help to interpret human adaptation in this rugged yet visually stunning landscape. The archeology of the region is discussed in a recent NET video about Nebraska’s State Historical Parks ([Adventures in History: Discovering Nebraska’s State Historical Parks](#) | Nebraska Public Media).



Ash Hollow Cave area and the North Platte River valley.

Paleoindian Bison Hunting

Several sites dating to the Paleoindian period have been the focus of excavations near Ash Hollow (Hill et al. 2005, 2011; Myers et al. 1981). These are some of the oldest sites in Nebraska and date to about ten thousand years ago. Nomadic hunters camped and butchered bison and processed hides at these sites. High-utility carcass portions were carried from nearby kill sites and then butchered including fracturing of the bone for marrow extraction. Numerous stone butchering tools and spearpoints were discovered. Natural springs are near these sites which were attractive to both animals and humans.



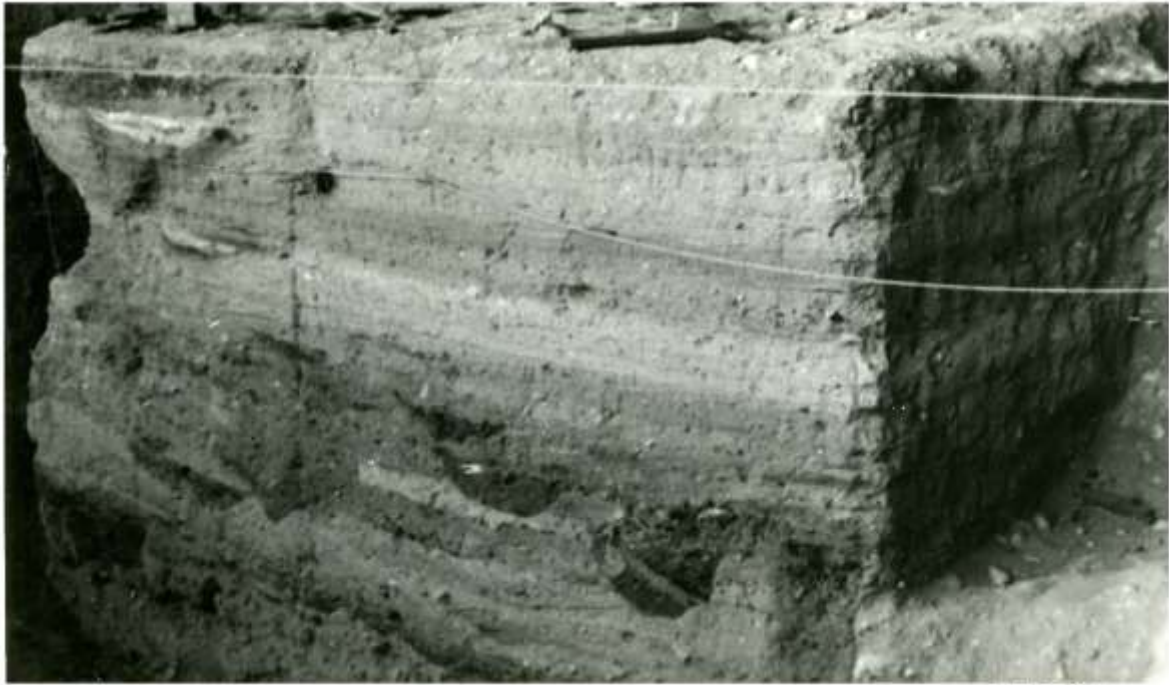
Stone knife butchering marks on ancient bison bone.



Ten-thousand-year-old spearpoints from a bison butchering site.

Butte Top Habitations

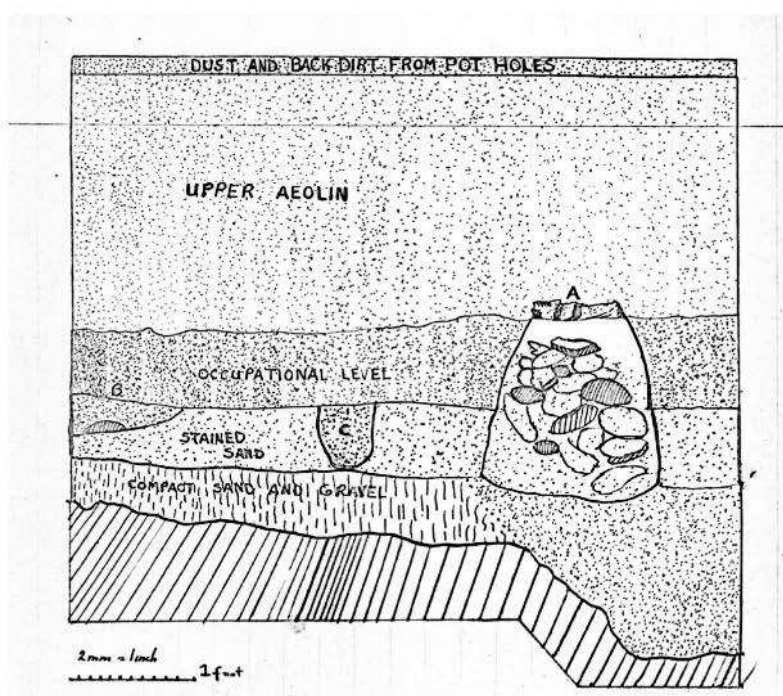
A unique feature of the North Platte valley landscape are flat-topped rocky buttes sculpted by millennia of wind and water erosion (Forbis 1985; LaBelle and Scoggin 2016). These buttes offer commanding game-watching views of the valley and also potentially served as defensive positions during periods of conflict. Evidence of Indigenous occupation of these buttes extends back at least six thousand years ago. Excavations at butte top camps produce large amounts of animal bones, charred vegetal foods, stone tools, broken ceramic pots, fireplaces, and even small cistern-like features cut or eroded into the rock -- a convenient method of catching rainwater.



Interior of Ash Hollow Cave showing ancient fireplaces (white and dark basin-shaped features) spanning two thousand years.

Ash Hollow Cave

One of the most important Indigenous archeological sites on the High Plains is Ash Hollow Cave (Champe 1946). This prominent rockshelter (not a true cave) was excavated by History Nebraska in 1939 and is in the state park. The shelter contains the stratified layers of multiple camps dating from over two thousand years ago to the four hundred years ago. The later occupations were by ancestors of the Pawnee and Apache. The investigation in part laid the groundwork for establishing the sequence of pre-Euroamerican contact Indigenous groups living in western Nebraska. A building was constructed over the excavations when the park was developed and visitors can walk down into the shelter and see many of the recovered artifacts.



Original 1939 fieldnote drawing from a butte top excavation depicting Indigenous roasting pit.

Emigrant Trails, Graves, and Trading Posts

From an archeological perspective, understanding mid-nineteenth century American westward expansion is captured through the study of wagon trails and related graves, stage stations and posts. Ash Hollow possesses important and remarkably well-preserved remnants of this period of the historic American West. Deep wagon trail ruts are visible throughout the park including the spectacular Windlass Hill. This hill features major ruts descending a steep grade into the North Platte valley from an upland segment of the trail. A little-known trading post along the trail has been explored through archeological excavation providing a glimpse into life along the arduous journey westward. Several graves are known along this segment of the trails including Rachel Pattison who died of cholera in her late teens in 1849.



Oregon Trail wagon ruts.

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Categories:

[archeology](#), [oregon trail](#), [Ash Hollow Cave](#), [Ash Hallow](#)

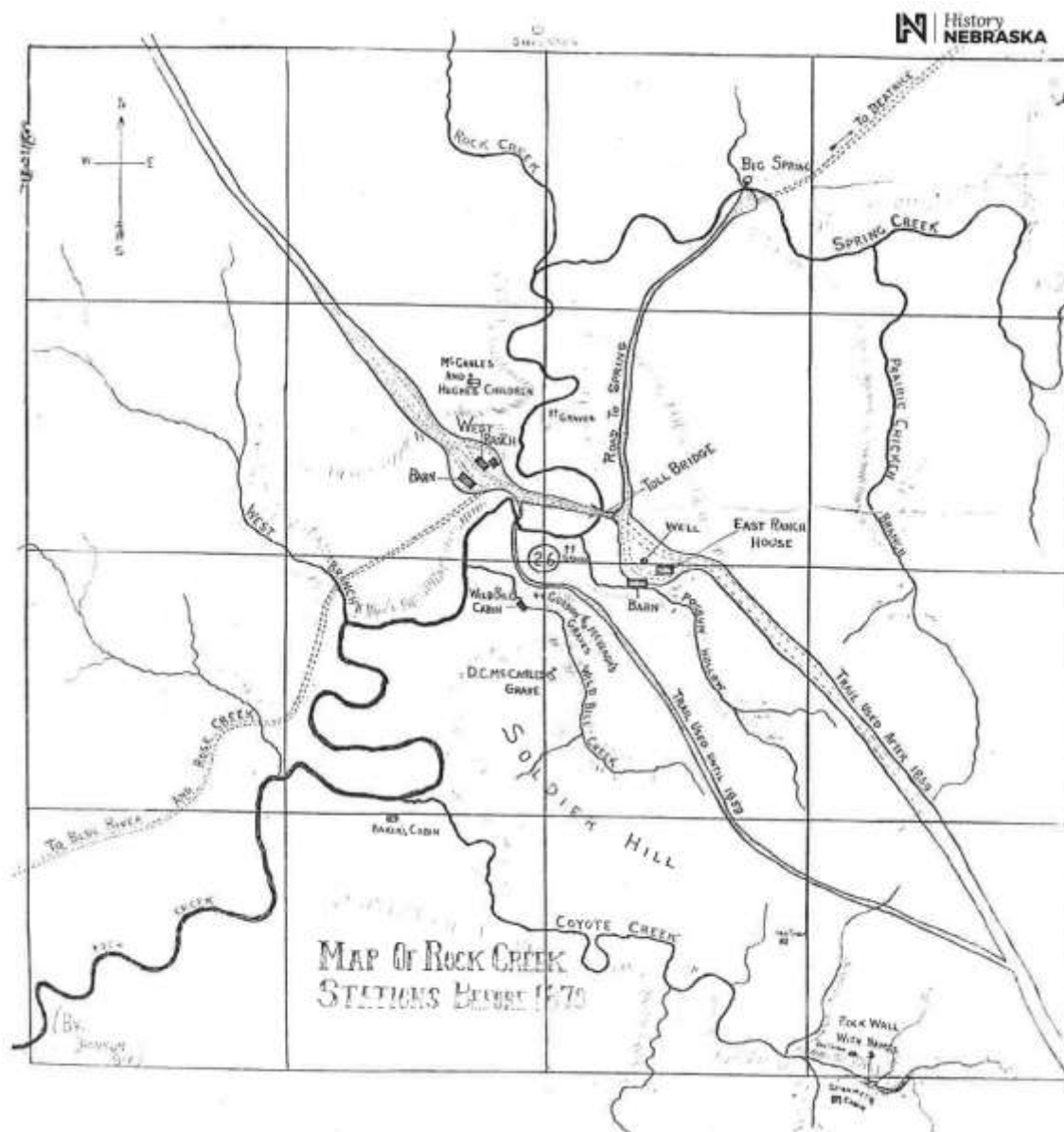
Rock Creek Station

Rock Creek Station is the name for two stations or road ranches on either side of a ford of Rock Creek on the Oregon-California Trail in extreme southern Jefferson County, NE. The ranches were occupied from 1857-1867 and served many roles including: as a pony express station, stage station, general store, blacksmith shop, and likely a post office. The station became famous in 1861 when James Butler “Wild Bill” Hickok shot and killed David McCanles over an unpaid debt owed to McCanles. A complete description of those events can be found in *Nebraska History Magazine* [Volume 49 Issue #1](#).

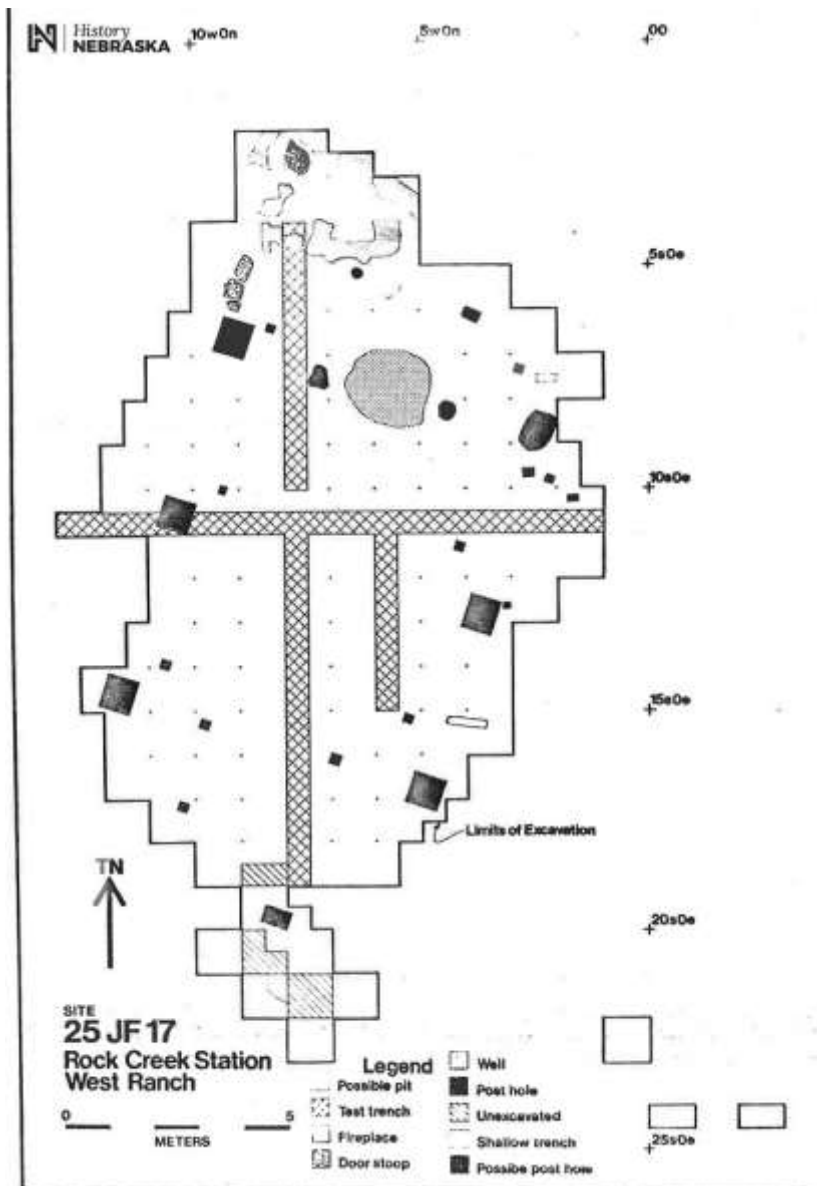
Development of Rock Creek Station State Historical Park began in 1980. Archeological work undertaken in 1980 and 1981 uncovered foundation remnants of some buildings as well as building related artifacts. This information was used to reconstruct some of the ranch buildings as close to their historic nature as possible.

In more recent years History Nebraska has done further work at Rock Creek Station State Historical Park and the adjoining campground. In 2016 portions of open grassland at the park were subject to a controlled burn, and archeologists from History Nebraska surveyed those areas before and after the burn. Several archeological sites and isolated artifacts were found around the park away from the reconstructed ranches. Two scatters of Native American artifacts were found that predate the site's use as a station. The survey allows for a more complete story of park to be told.

Most recently, in 2021 History Nebraska has surveyed two projects, an electrical upgrade to the camp ground and a bank stabilization project. During the trenching for the electrical line logs or planking was found in the ground. The wood may relate to the trail and could have assisted wagons navigating the steep grade up from the ford. These efforts showcase the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and History Nebraska's commitment to maintain and improve the park while preserving its historic features.



Map of Rock Creek Station in 1870



Excavation of the "Main House" at the West Ranch



Photo of the East Ranch in 1860 from the Piecing Together the Past exhibit at the Nebraska History Museum



Reconstructed Buildings at the East Ranch



Reconstructed Buildings at the West Ranch



Wagon Wheel Rim Found in the Post Burn Survey of 2016



Electrical Line Installation in 2020

Categories:

[archeology](#), [Rock Creek Station](#), [Jefferson County](#), [Wild Bill](#), [David McCanles](#)

Bugles at Fort Robinson



The building now called the Post Playhouse at Fort Robinson was for many years the quartermaster's warehouse. In 1991 the building underwent renovations. When the floor was removed, thousands of items from a long span of time that had been discarded in the 1920s were found in the crawl space underneath the floor. A trap door had once allowed access to the crawl space and for some reason the quartermaster employees disposed of things beneath the floor rather than discard them in a more regular fashion. This picture is just a fraction of the number of bugle mouth pieces that were found.

Why the fort would need to have so many at any given time remains a mystery.

Categories:

[Bugles](#), [Fort Robinson](#)

Fort Atkinson Council House

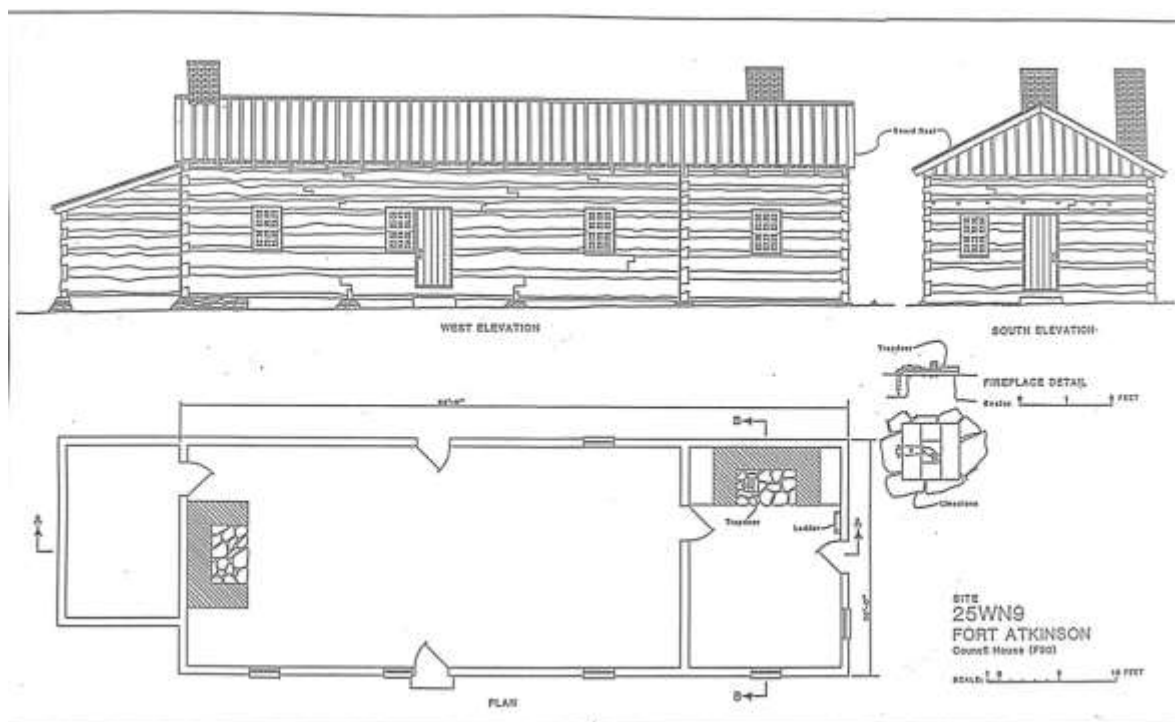
Some of the structures at Fort Atkinson State Historical Park have been reconstructed very accurately from data gathered by archeologists from History Nebraska. Three of the four barrack's walls from the barrack quadrangle and the powder magazine are the centerpiece and what people envision from a frontier fort. However, Fort Atkinson was built to be self-sufficient

and was composed of 30 to 40 buildings at its height. One of the nonmilitary buildings that has also been reconstructed is the Council House.

The Council House was excavated in 1984 under the supervision of former History Nebraska archeologist Gayle Carlson. Historical research, also conducted by Carlson, described the Council House as a two room, one large and one small, structure with two fireplaces. The large room was used as a meeting place or as a space for Native Americans to stay in when visiting the fort. It was also used on occasion for social events (Carlson 1990:93-94). A loft in the smaller room was used to store goods the Indian Agent would use to maintain friendly relations with the local Native Americans. The smaller room also served as the living quarters for the Indian Agent.

The remains of the building were completely excavated. Five foundation piers were found in place. These were used to level the first course of logs. The remains of two fireplaces, one for each room, were also found. These two sets of features help to confirm the dimensions of the structure. The distribution of nails, door hardware, and window glass also contributed to firmly outlining the building. The amount of window glass was densest on the west side of the building indicating this was the main entrance. The outline of the building and the structural features are shown below on an air photo of the reconstructed Council House at Fort Atkinson State Historical Park. As you can see, the reconstruction lines up nearly exactly with the archeological features.

Excavation Map of the Council House



Artist's Rendering of the Council House

While so clearly defining the building is quite the accomplishment and allowed the building to be faithfully reconstructed, the Council House excavation held perhaps this author's favorite archeological feature. A circulate pit underneath the fireplace base in the smaller of the two rooms held a large hinge. The pit would have been covered by a trap door, held in place by the hinge. The pit would have served as a place to hide items underneath soot, ashes, and perhaps a layer of unmortared brick or limestone slabs. Rarely does archeology resemble cinematic depictions, but in this instance, archeologists in 1984 did indeed find a secret compartment.



Archeological Excavation Overlaid on an Air Photo

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Categories:

[archeology](#), [Archeology Month](#), [Fort Atkinson](#), [Council House](#), [Fort Atkinson State Historical Park](#)

Fort Atkinson Two Bits and Two Insignias

Making change at Fort Atkinson, Nebraska was a lot harder in the 1820s than it is today. Common practice at the time was to cut dollar coins into eight "bits," two bits being the equivalent of a quarter. Here are some examples of bits that were excavated at Fort Atkinson by the Nebraska State Historical Society, now History Nebraska. Both are from Spanish silver coins. The piece on the left is 1/8 of a coin or 1 bit and the section on the right is 1/4 of a coin or 2 bits.



"Bits" of a Spanish Silver Coin

Fort Atkinson was the first U.S. Military post west of the Missouri River. The fort was occupied between 1820 and 1827. It is now a Nebraska State Historical Park. The fort has seen extensive excavations over the years conducted by the Nebraska State Historical Society, now History Nebraska. Tens of thousands of artifacts have been collected. Unsurprisingly many relate to the soldiers who were stationed there. Here are two of our favorites. These are rifle regiment hat insignias and are made of brass. The top insignia is the 1817 pattern and the bottom is the 1814 pattern.



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NEBRASKA

1800s Rifle Regiment Insignias

Categories:

[Fort Atkinson](#), [Rifle](#), [Rifle insignia](#), [Insignias](#), [Spanish Silver Coin](#), [Two bits](#)

Fort Hartsuff State Historical Park

Fort Hartsuff State Historical Park is located in the North Loup Valley near the town of Elyria. The fort was a frontier military post from 1874 to 1881, and was built to protect local settlers and the Pawnee Tribe from the perceived threat of hostile Native American incursions. However, the soldiers at the fort saw only one minor skirmish during its seven year existence.

The presence of the fort did reassure the local settlers. The fort's most important role was as an employer for construction projects and other odd jobs, and a market for the local farmers to sell their crops. The presence of the fort greatly helped the settlers to weather the grasshopper plague of 1874 (Wagner 2008:154-167). The fort was also an important social gathering place for the local population. Here is a photo of the fort at roughly the time of its abandonment.

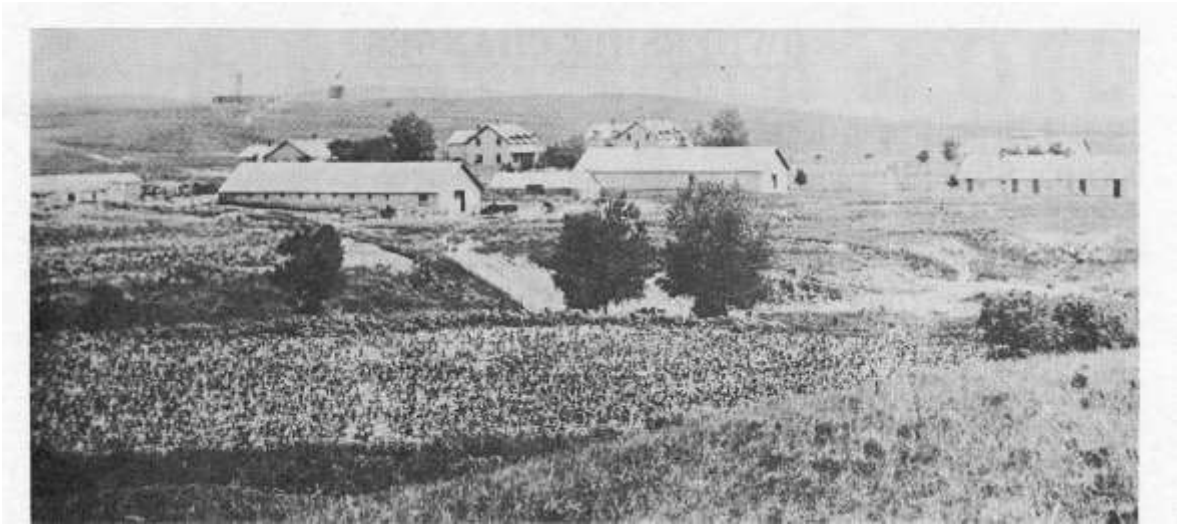
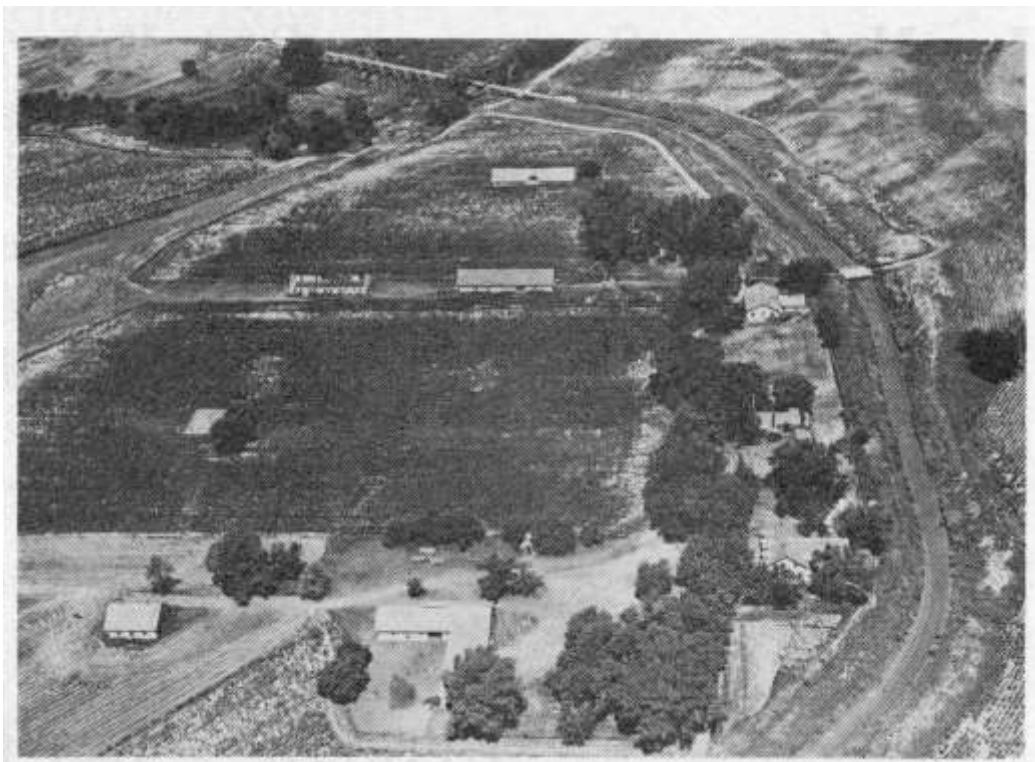


Photo from 25VY21 Site File

The 1,280 acre military reservation and nine original buildings were acquired by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission in 1961, but the park has not seen any systematic archeological investigation. The striking difference between this fort and Fort Atkinson and Fort Robinson is that many of the original buildings at Fort Hartsuff are still standing. Below are air photos from 1951 and 2017. Much of the archeology in the State Historical Parks was undertaken to allow for accurate reconstructions, but this was unnecessary at Fort Hartsuff.



1951 Photo from 25VY21 Site File

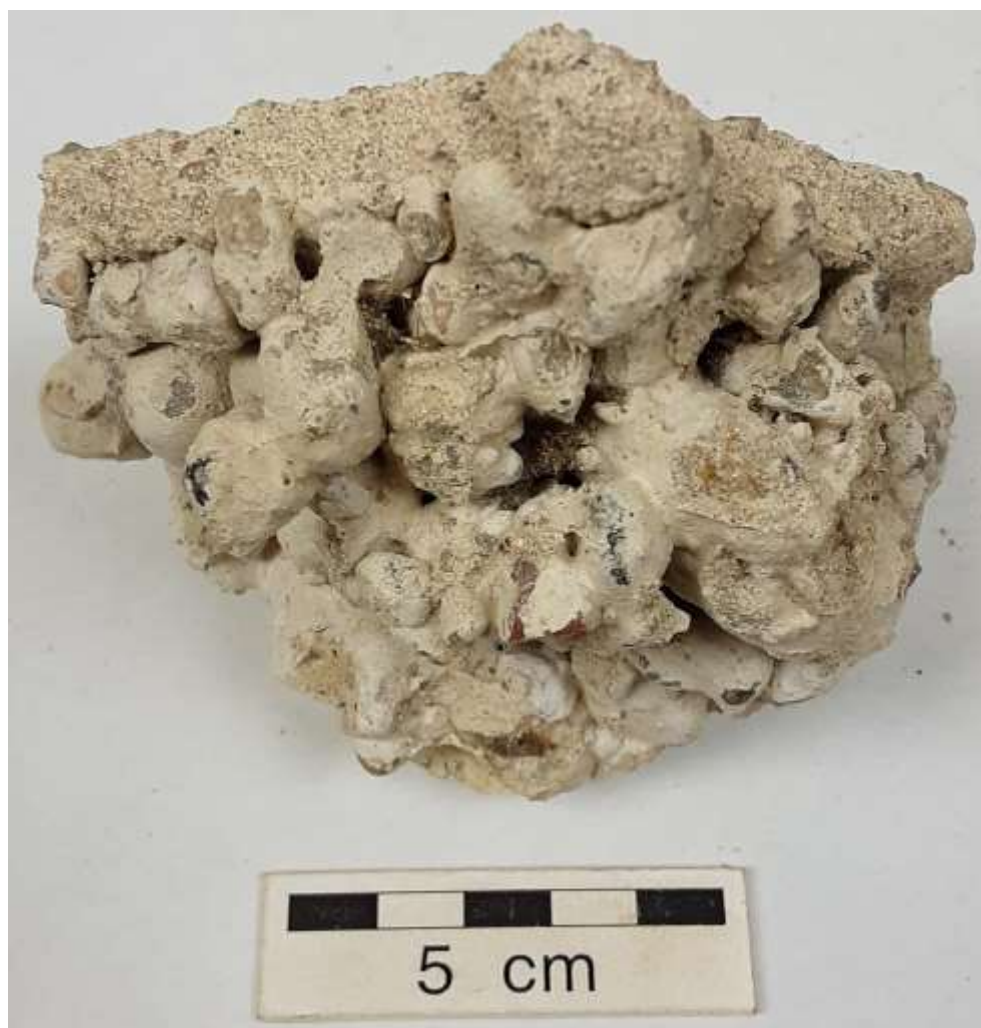


2017 Image from Google Earth

The fort owes its longevity to a construction method unique to Fort Hartsuff among Nebraska forts. The buildings at the fort were made of a lime/concrete mixture known as grout. The construction technique involved cementing larger stones together with smaller pebbles filling any spaces and then facing the entire structure with the lime/concrete mixture to achieve smooth walls inside and out. Shortly after the state acquired the fort, archeologists from the Nebraska State Historical Society, now History Nebraska, did collect a few grout pieces that had broken off of the fort jail.



Exterior Face of a Grout Fragment



Interior Face of a Grout Fragment

References

Alexandra M Wagner, "Grasshoppered: America's Response to the 1874 Rocky Mountain Locust Invasion," *Nebraska History* 89 (2008): 154-167.

Unpublished material from the 25VY21 archeological site file at History Nebraska.

Categories:

[archeology](#), [Archeology Month](#), [Nebraska State Archeology Office](#), [Fort Hartsuff](#), [North Loup Valley](#), [Elyria](#), [Nebraska Archeology](#)

The Chadron State Park Site

In 1940 workers at the park uncovered Native American artifacts while working on the foundation of a new building. News of the discovery reached Asa. T. Hill, the director of the museum at the Nebraska State Historical Society, now History Nebraska. Mr. Hill and two assistants spent nine days excavating a portion of the site. The archeological site was designated 25DW1 the Chadron State Park Site. The excavation at the site was hurried due to its salvage nature and the artifact collection went unreported until the 2010s when then Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office Archeologist Terry Steinacher analyzed the artifacts and excavation notes (Steinacher 2014).

At the site were the remains of an earthlodge and several storage pits. Some of the storage pits were excavated into the wall of the earthlodge and must date to a time after it had been abandoned. The stakes in the photo below outline the earthlodge after the excavators had identified it from the dark circular stain in the lighter subsoil.



Chadron State Park 25DW1-5

Large amount of bone, much of it bison, were found as evident from some site photos, but most of those bones were not kept. Only bone with human modifications was returned to Lincoln for future study. The modified bone collection includes: awls, bison scapula tools, a bison ulna

digging tool, a shaft wrench, a bone fish hook, bone and antler beads, and miscellaneous fragments that show some sort of modification. Perhaps the most striking find at the site was a bison rib handle and associated knife blade. The pair were not found fitted together, but the field notes refer to the artifacts as being found “in the same fill” (Steinacher 2014:69) and they do fit together nicely.



Figure 29. 25DW1, Bone Recovered from the Excavation.

128 CENTRAL PLAINS ARCHAEOLOGY



Figure 6. Fishhook and arlder and bone beads from 250W1.

STEINACHER / CHADRON STATE PARK SITE 85



Figure 10. 25D4W1 Bison Rib Knife Handle.

N History
NEBRASKA

Bone Handle and Stone Knife Blade

Other artifacts from the site include stone tools and ceramics. Projectile points are missing from the artifact collection and were likely picked up by locals before Mr. Hill got to the site. The other stone tools include: bifaces, scrapers, cores, retouched flakes, ground stone tools, and unmodified flakes. These are all fairly typical of habitation sites.

The ceramic collection at the site is a bit of a mystery. It is a large collection for such a short excavation. The ceramics include over 1500 body sherds and 125 rim sherds. The ceramics are mostly homogeneous and appear to have been made by one group of potters. A few of the body sherds have pairs of holes drilled through them. This is commonly thought of as a way to tie together a cracked pot. The interesting fact is that the collection shows a blending of traits from the earlier Woodland tradition and later Central Plains tradition. Due to the lack of specific provenience for the artifacts it is not known if 25DW1 represents separate Woodland and Central Plains tradition occupations or some blending of the two. Future work on similar sites, currently undiscovered or unreported, may be able to answer this question.

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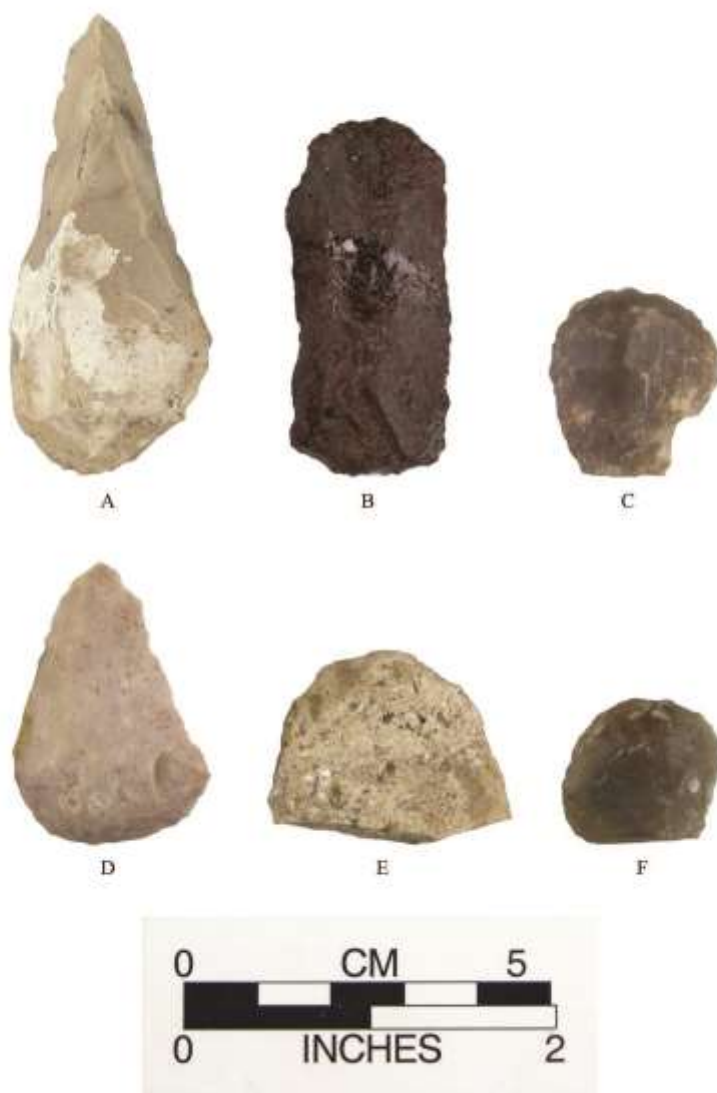
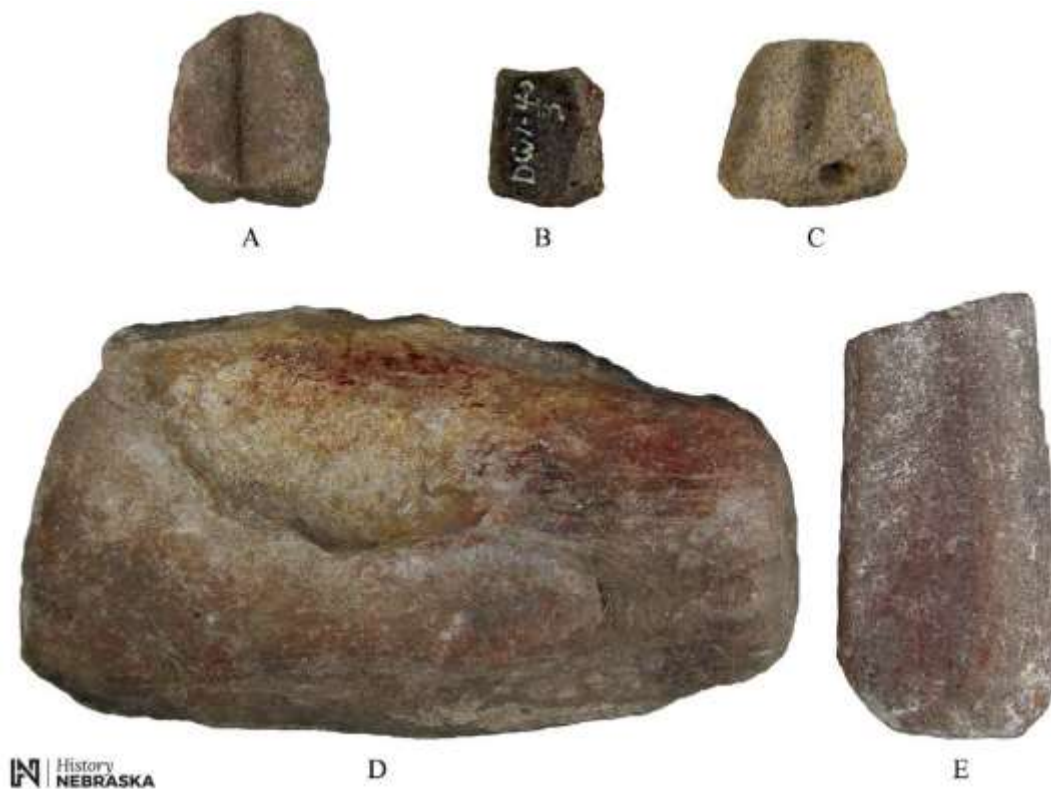


Figure 13. 25DW1 End-Scrapers.



Ground Stone Tools

U- (ENTR) PLAIN-ARC-VIS-007



Figure 18. 25DW1, Lab Photo of Reconstructed Pot.



Reconstructed Pot



Figure 18. 25DW1 Body Shards with Drilled Holes.

History
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Missteps by an Episcopal Priest that Led to Segregation

By Breanna Fanta, Editorial Assistant

It's 1868 in Nebraska City. The Civil War is over and the town is now home to a community of African Americans recently freed from Southern slavery. Few know how to read. A White Episcopal priest and a Black Protestant preacher establish St. Augustine's, a place of both worship and education for local Black residents. The goal is to advance equality, but instead the project establishes racial segregation in local schools. Historian Jo Wetherilt Behrens tells the story in "The Troubled Road to Equality for African Americans in Nebraska City, Nebraska: Missteps by an Episcopal Priest that led to Segregation, 1868 – 1893," in *Nebraska History Magazine's* Summer 2021 issue.

Reverend William Henry Wilson and Reverend Robert W. Oliver both arrived in Nebraska City around 1868. Wilson had been born into slavery in Virginia, and later worked as a barber and unordained preacher to local African American Methodists. Oliver was an ex-British Army officer who served as Dean of the Divinity Department at the Episcopal Church's college in Nebraska City. While living in Pennsylvania before the Civil War, Oliver had been an abolitionist and was active in the Underground Railroad.

In Nebraska City, Oliver organized a day school for the Black community. It held classes from the late 1860s to the early 1870s. Students were taught from the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer because he "thought it better to educate them up to the standard of the church, than to bring the church down to theirs."

The Nebraska City School Board addressed the inadequacies of the education the day school was providing. The board opened a formal teaching position and the school raised money for new materials.

In the summer of 1870, the chapel of St. Augustine's was erected under the direction of Preacher Wilson and the support of Reverend Oliver as a separate space for African Americans to practice their religious freedoms. Years afterward it was converted to serve as both a chapel and schoolhouse for the Black community.



In 1879, the school board deliberated whether to keep St. Augustine's doors open. If they closed the school, Black students would be integrated into existing public schools. If the separation of facilities remained, a new building would need to be constructed, but the board wondered whether the local African American population was large enough to "warrant the expense."

Reverend Oliver, both an abolitionist and a segregationist, did not believe integrating schools was a good decision. His grandson years later noted: "He wanted the negro to have every advantage that freedom affords ..." but also believed that separate schools with Black teachers was best.

Oliver volunteered to keep the school open without city funding, but the school board decided to integrate.

That fall, Black students were hesitant to enroll in school out of fear of animosity from their White peers, but they gradually returned.

(Above: "St. Augustine Episcopal Church, an African American church in Nebraska City, illustration from *The Guardian* (published by the Episcopal Diocese of Nebraska), May 1, 1874.")

The following summer Oliver vowed to end school integration. He petitioned the school board to provide a separate school for Black students. He offered for St. Augustine's to be again "at the disposal of the school board free of all demands."

A rumor circulated that the board was willing to dedicate a single classroom for solely Black students, but Oliver refused. He wanted Black students to have the same academic experiences as the White students, but separately and without fear of being taunted.

Nebraska City schools remained integrated for another three years.

During this time, the collaboration between the Episcopal church and the Black community was altered. Behrens suggests that the “growing tension over integration may have played a role in Rev. William Henry Wilson’s decision to leave Nebraska in November 1877.” The function of the St. Augustine building shifted from education to serving and supporting impoverished African Americans.

During the summer of 1882—the same year a Black student was valedictorian of the public school graduating class—the segregation issue reemerged. Black parents were divided in their opinions. Some opposed segregation and believed it resulted in an inadequate education; others strongly believed the opposite. Either way, Black parents wanted the same security, privileges and rights for their children as provided in the existing public schools.

Ultimately, the school board’s main concern was economics.

Oliver, persistent that “separation” could mean “equality,” approached the board with the same offers as before. This time they accepted.

St. Augustine was used as a separate school for another decade of segregated schools. During that period, the building became severely dilapidated. “Forcing Black children to learn in a decrepit building was its own kind of racism,” Behrens writes.

Finally in 1893, the school board closed St. Augustine, which by then had only 12 students attending.

Long gone, the St. Augustine school remains a cautionary tale. Robert W. Oliver’s efforts provided some service to the Black community, but they were ultimately missteps. He acknowledged the need for education, but failed in recognizing how to achieve equality. In an academic setting, equality could not be taught in separation but had to be learned side-by-side.



(Left: "Rev. Dr. [Robert] William Oliver came to Nebraska City in 1868 to serve as head of the Divinity Department at Nebraska College.")

The entire article can be found in the Summer 2021 edition of the Nebraska History Magazine. Members receive four issues per year.

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Segregation, Nebraska City